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Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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98-81717 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 143: Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of the United Nations peacekeeping operations *(continued)*

(a) Financing of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations *(continued)* (A/C.5/53/L.9)

1. **Mr. Armitage** (Australia), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.9 on the support account for peacekeeping operations, observed that it represented the Committee's final decision on the support account for the period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 1999 and reaffirmed General Assembly resolutions 52/234 and 52/248. He proposed the following revisions: in paragraphs 7, eighth line, the word "and" should be deleted after the phrase "of its report"; and in paragraph 10, fourth line, the phrase "those and the recent resolutions" should be replaced by the phrase "these and the current resolutions".

2. The draft resolution explicitly reaffirmed the approval of 400 support account-funded temporary posts and requested the Secretary-General, when determining their allocation, to take into account the observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee as contained in its report (A/53/418).

3. In addition to setting that general framework, the draft resolution gave specific guidance to the Secretary-General on two issues: first, it established two civilian posts for a rapidly deployable mission headquarters and decided that the Committee would revert to the issue of the other proposed positions when it considered the new information the Secretary-General would include in his next support account submission, developing the concept of a rapidly deployable mission headquarters and its relationship with the Mission Planning Service; secondly, it decided to establish one post at the P-4 level for the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

4. In the final paragraph of the text, regret was expressed that a comprehensive review of the issues raised in the three previous resolutions on the item had not been carried out and the Secretary-General was requested to undertake that review and report on its conduct and on the implementation of the current resolution addressing a range of structural and management issues, including those raised by the Advisory Committee.

5. **Ms. Buergo-Rodríguez** (Cuba) proposed that the phrase "taking into account" in paragraph 7 should be replaced by the words "to address".

6. Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.9, as orally revised, was adopted.

7. **Ms. Butschek** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, **Mr. Bond** (United States of America), **Mr. Saha** (India) and **Ms. Buergo-Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that they reserved the right to speak when the report of the Fifth Committee on the item was taken up by the plenary Assembly.

8. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said that for lack of the relevant information, the Committee had not been in a position to conduct an in-depth examination of many of the support account posts requested by the Secretary-General. Under the circumstances, his delegation had expressed support for the Advisory Committee's recommendations as the only reasonable available solution, since the Advisory Committee had conducted a post-by-post analysis. He regretted that a consensus had not been possible and that, moreover, note had not even been taken of the report of the Advisory Committee as a whole. The draft resolution just adopted represented the result of a compromise painful to all delegations. In order to enable the Committee to adopt a sound and satisfactory decision in the future and to avoid a recurrence of that sort of frustration, the Secretariat should take paragraph 10 of the draft resolution very seriously and include all the information needed in the next support account proposal.

9. **Ms. Duschner** (Canada) welcomed the establishment at last of rapidly deployable mission headquarters, some three years after the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations had urged the Secretary-General to create it. In July 1996, the Secretary-General had instructed the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to implement the rapidly deployable mission headquarters. It would fulfil a valuable planning function in future peacekeeping operations. Whenever a new mission seemed likely to be given a mandate by the Security Council, the rapidly deployable mission headquarters would focus full-time on making detailed arrangements for it. All the details of how and why specific planning decisions were made for a given mission would form part of its "institutional memory", which would be passed on to other Headquarters personnel performing similar functions, thereby providing much-needed continuity.

10. The rapidly deployable mission headquarters would coordinate the development, detailed organizational structure, terms of reference, staff procedures, standard administrative procedures, logistic support and financial plans and all the details needed to make the headquarters

function effectively. It would also develop and coordinate a training programme.

11. In view of the many benefits of the establishment of such a headquarters, his delegation regretted that the Committee could agree only on the two civilian posts and not on the much-needed eight posts requested by the Secretary-General, whose importance had been recognized by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 16 of its report.

12. His delegation looked forward to the Secretary-General's support account submission for the period 1999–2000, which should respond to the issues raised during the consultations so that the Committee would be in a position to approve the remaining posts, thus making the rapidly deployable mission headquarters fully operational and helping to improve the rapid reaction capability of the United Nations in peacekeeping activities, as called for in resolution 52/12 B.

13. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) said that she supported the statement of the delegation of Canada.

14. **Mr. Lozinski** (Russian Federation) said that, although he had joined the consensus on the agenda item under consideration, he wished to stress that in opting for micromanagement, the Committee had not chosen the best way to address the matter of certain units involved in backstopping United Nations peacekeeping operations that were funded with support account resources. Although he was aware of and respected the different views of delegations on the question, he felt that selective solutions did not allow for balance and were not fair. He hoped the Committee would avoid that approach in future.

15. The draft resolution which had just been adopted gave the Secretary-General a certain amount of flexibility in regard to the quantitative aspects of its implementation. He hoped that the Secretary-General would take advantage of that flexibility to ensure maximum effectiveness in the performance of the Organization's peacekeeping functions. Ultimately, what was at stake was the well-being, the health and the lives of people who worked for the United Nations in order to maintain peace. The Secretary-General should make every effort to maintain an adequate level of specialized know-how, particularly in military matters, once the gratis personnel left, and to ensure that the replacement staff were duly qualified. He also hoped that the Secretariat would bear in mind the observations made by Member States during the debate, as well as the request contained in paragraph 10 of the draft resolution, which was a prerequisite to any balanced and exhaustive study of future requests relating to the support account.

Agenda Item 117: Pattern of Conferences (A/51/946; A/52/7 (paras. 113 and 114), A/52/685, A/52/803 and A/52/1000; A/53/16 (paras. 334–352), A/53/21, A/53/32, A/53/221, A/53/257 and A/53/507)

16. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Chairman, Committee on Conferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/53/32), said that the Committee recommended the draft revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1999 for adoption by the General Assembly.

17. Over the years, the Committee had endeavoured to heighten the awareness of the members of subsidiary organs with regard to the optimum utilization of conference resources. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/214, part A, paragraph 16, it had held consultations with and had sent letters to the chairpersons of the bodies whose utilization factor had been lower than 80 per cent, with a view to making appropriate recommendations to improve their utilization of conference-servicing resources. Another important tool for improving the utilization of conference resources was intra-Secretariat cooperation via an active dialogue between conference services and substantive secretariats pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/206 A, paragraph 9. That exercise had enabled the Secretariat to provide statistics and information on previous performance and make suggestions on ways and means to enhance utilization of conference-servicing resources.

18. The Committee on Conferences had taken note with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for 1997 had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent and that the utilization factors at Geneva and Vienna respectively had been 87 per cent and 88 per cent. The Committee had expressed satisfaction at the improvement in utilization rates of the conference facilities at Nairobi between 1996 and 1997, and had encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to consider increasing their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi.

19. The Committee had expressed satisfaction that 81 per cent of the requests for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States had been met during the period from end-June 1997 to end-June 1998, which represented a marked increase of 13 per cent over the previous reporting period (end-June 1996 to end-June 1997). The Committee had recognized the importance of such meetings and had urged intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to make provision for such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify conference services well in advance of any cancellations, so that unutilized conference-servicing resources might, to the extent possible,

be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States.

20. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/214, part D, paragraph 1, the Committee on Conferences had taken note of the various reports on the cost-accounting system for conference services and, in particular, of the objectives that a cost-accounting system would achieve. The Committee had stressed the need to take into consideration the experience of all duty stations when improvements were made in existing information systems. It had also requested the Secretariat to provide preliminary estimates of the expenditures necessary to establish a permanent system as well as a time-frame for each phase of the project, once approved by the General Assembly.

21. The Committee on Conferences had considered requests for exceptions to General Assembly resolution 40/243, part I, paragraph 7, in which the Assembly had decided that no subsidiary organ of the General Assembly might meet at United Nations Headquarters during a regular session of the Assembly unless explicitly authorized by the Assembly. The Committee had recommended to the General Assembly that it should explicitly authorize five subsidiary organs, as indicated in documents A/52/340/Add.2 and A/53/298, to meet in New York during the main part of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly on the understanding that meetings would have to be accommodated as facilities and services became available so that the activities of the Assembly itself would not be adversely affected. Subsequent to that recommendation, two additional requests from intergovernmental bodies to meet during the main part of the session had been received. The Committee had recommended one of them to the General Assembly for approval, while the other was being reviewed before a recommendation was made to the General Assembly.

22. The Committee on Conferences had also considered the question of control and limitation of documentation and, *inter alia*, had undertaken a review of late issuance, meeting records, compliance with page limitations and translation-related matters. It had welcomed the establishment of a system of focal points in substantive departments to monitor documentation. While the Committee had identified areas of possible delay in the processing and issuance of documentation pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/214, part B, paragraph 23, it had recognized the need for more detailed information on the problem. The Committee had requested the Secretariat to submit to it, at its substantive session in 1999, a report containing detailed data on the reasons for delays in the issuance of documentation and an analysis of the additional costs incurred by document-processing services and of other financial implications of the late submission and issuance of documents.

23. The Committee on Conferences had noted with appreciation the efforts made by the Secretariat to address the concerns expressed by delegations on translation-related matters, including through continuous training for staff and the introduction of new technology, and had encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to improve quality and proficiency in all six translation services. The Committee had also noted with appreciation that the backlog of publications awaiting translation had been eliminated since the moratorium on contractual translations had been lifted. Furthermore, the Committee had encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to ensure effective linguistic quality through to the final stage of document publication.

24. **Mr. Jin Yongjian** (Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services) said that he had informed the Committee one year previously of the integration of the technical secretariat services for the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and their subsidiary bodies, and the Office of Conference and Support Services into one Department, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Since its establishment, the new Department had provided technical secretariat services to plenary meetings of the General Assembly (in both regular and special sessions), the Assembly's General Committee and its First, Special Political and Decolonization, Second and Third Committees, the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the Disarmament Commission, the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, the Economic and Social Council and the majority of the Council's subsidiary organs, and a number of other intergovernmental meetings and consultations.

25. The consolidation of the secretariats of most of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council bodies in the same Department had allowed for better coordination and the avoidance of the time-consuming interdepartmental consultations of previous years. The preparation of regular and special sessions of the Assembly had thus become easier. Committee secretariats and conference services were now in much closer contact, since they both belonged to the same Department.

26. An additional gain resulting from the consolidation was the presence in the new Department of the Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit. With the technical secretariat servicing teams for different committees

and intergovernmental bodies in a single Department, the role of the Unit as the clearing-house for General Assembly and ECOSOC documents had been strengthened, thereby affording better overall coordination and rationalization of documentation.

27. The main document before the Fifth Committee under item 117: Pattern of conferences was the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/53/32). The report included a revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1999, which the Committee on Conferences recommended to the General Assembly for adoption. As could be seen from the document, the calendar for 1999 was full and included two special sessions of the General Assembly, one from 30 June to 2 July for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, and the other in September, preceding the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, for an assessment and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

28. As he had mentioned in his statement to the Committee on Conferences the previous month, in order to bridge the gap between the demand for conference services and the capacity available at specific times and in specific places, his Department was constantly seeking to improve its planning and control functions and the management of its priorities. It was also tightening coordination arrangements with substantive secretariats, resorting increasingly to balanced exchanges of resources and workloads among the different duty stations and searching for productivity improvements through the use of available technology and managerial innovations.

29. Given the resource constraints, it was gratifying to note the overall improvement in the rate of utilization by intergovernmental bodies of the conference resources available to them. In that connection, the Committee on Conferences had noted with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for 1997 had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent and that the utilization factors at Geneva and Vienna, respectively, were 87 per cent and 88 per cent. He wished to congratulate the Chairpersons and substantive secretariats of the bodies that had contributed to the attainment of those figures.

30. With regard to the provision of interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, 81 per cent of the requests for such meetings had been met during the period from the end of June 1997 to the end of June 1998, which represented an increase of 13 per cent over the previous reporting year. While recognizing the need to provide conference services for such meetings in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 50/206 A and 51/211 A, the Committee on Conferences, in paragraph 32 of its report, again urged intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify the conference services well in advance of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources might, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States.

31. Another source of pride for the Secretariat was the provision of facilities and services for bilateral meetings during the general debate of the General Assembly, in accordance with Assembly resolution 50/206 F. Requests for such meetings had been increasing and in the current year's shortened two-week general debate a total of 892 bilateral meetings had been serviced, as against 858 in 1997 and 751 in 1996 (over a three-week period).

32. But more important than their volume was the quality of the services provided by the Department, whose overriding concern, even in an era of limited resources, was to maintain the highest standards in its services and outputs. While the Department had its own internal evaluation and quality control mechanisms, the best judges of its efforts were the Member States, which were the users of its services. Where, despite everything, lapses did occur, the circumstances were immediately investigated and remedial action taken. The Department was sincerely grateful when errors were brought to its attention, since such knowledge was helpful in the Department's continuous efforts to attain the highest standards of quality.

33. At the same time, the Department was conscious of the need to achieve maximum efficiency. To that end, it was redesigning its working methods in several areas to make use of the potential offered by state-of-the-art technology. For example, the Department was beginning to use remote verbatim reporting by electronically sending digitalized and compressed sound recordings of statements made in meeting rooms to reporters located in Europe, South America and the South Pacific, who drafted the verbatim record and sent it back, also electronically. New technologies were also being introduced in the translation services. Since April, all translators and revisers had been equipped with state-of-the-art computers with access to the Optical Disk System (ODS). Contractual translators too could now consult the Optical Disk System free of charge over the Internet. Also, access to terminology databases by all language staff had been expanded and facilitated and more powerful PC-based systems had been integrated into the work of terminologists, who could now update the terminology database on a daily

basis. Furthermore, computer-assisted translation was in the process of being introduced as a result of the extensive research carried out by the Working Group on Technological Innovations of the Translation and Editorial Division, which was comprised of revisers, translators, editors and terminologists of all language services. All of those innovations were making it possible to improve the methods and quality of work of language staff and to ensure speedier, more efficient and more consistent production.

34. As the Committee was aware, remote translation had already become a standard working method not only for major conferences and for meetings away from established headquarters but also for workload exchanges among duty stations. The Department was now working towards remote interpretation. The following January, the Department proposed to service a full session of an intergovernmental body in Geneva with interpreters stationed in Vienna. That first-time use of remote interpretation in real-life conditions was intended as a step towards establishing such an arrangement between those two duty stations. In addition, the Department was considering the establishment of similar facilities between Vienna and Nairobi, thus making it possible to convene more meetings at the Organization's African headquarters. During his recent visit to the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) in June, he had been impressed by the motivation of the conference service staff and by the quality of the physical meeting facilities that were available there. He had had extensive discussions with senior officers in Conference Services and in administration at UNON, including the Director-General, and with the Secretaries of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements and everyone concerned was determined to make every effort to ensure that the potential for conference servicing in Nairobi was fully realized. Knowing, however, that the increased utilization of any specific United Nations conference centre ultimately depended on the will of Member States, the Committee on Conferences had encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to consider increasing their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi.

35. With regard to the renewed concerns expressed by delegations about the need for a more timely issuance of documentation, a matter which had acquired a new sensitivity, the Secretariat had designated focal points for documentation in every author department. With their assistance, the Department would seek to identify as precisely as possible the causes of the delays and possible ways of resolving them. In that connection, the Committee on Conferences had requested the Secretariat to submit to it, at its substantive session for 1999, a report containing detailed data on the reasons for delays in the issuance of documentation and an analysis of the additional costs incurred by document-processing services and of other financial implications of the late submission and issuance of documents.

36. He wished to express his appreciation for the guidance and support which the Department continued to receive from the Fifth Committee and the Committee on Conferences and to pledge that his Department would spare no effort to provide the services required to meet the needs of Member States and to make the most efficient and effective use of conference-servicing resources.

37. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, in addition, Iceland and Norway, commended the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the very effective manner in which arrangements had been made for ministerial meetings parallel to the general debate.

38. The European Union attached great importance to conference services. The work of intergovernmental organs and expert bodies of the United Nations required high-quality meeting and documentation services. The need to ensure the equal treatment of the six official languages added to the complexity of conference services; hence, the most rational and effective use must be made of those services. The establishment of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services was a confirmation of the functional authority with regard to conference services Secretariat-wide, and would allow for closer coordination of conference services to achieve maximum cost-effectiveness, while ensuring the required standard of services.

39. He supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences to adopt the revised draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1999, as well as the recommendations included in paragraphs 11 and 12 of its report (A/53/32). He also agreed with the Committee's recommendation concerning the need to make every effort to avoid having too many meetings under way simultaneously in the various duty stations at peak periods. He hoped that in considering exceptions to the rule that the various bodies should hold their meetings at their headquarters, due account would be taken of the level of utilization of conference services at that location.

40. With respect to the overall utilization factor for conference services, he expressed satisfaction that the

benchmark of 80 per cent had been exceeded, in particular at Geneva and Vienna, and agreed that the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should continue consultations with the chairpersons of the bodies whose level of utilization had fallen consistently below the benchmark, so that those bodies would make maximum use of their available resources.

41. He also supported the Secretariat's efforts to resolve in an efficient manner, and with the use of advanced technology, the problem of the high cost of interpretation services provided for the United Nations Office at Nairobi, where the programme of meetings did not justify permanent interpretation capacity. In that regard, he supported the Secretariat's intention to provide remote interpretation services from the United Nations Office at Vienna.

42. A more accurate and comprehensive cost-accounting system was required so that conference services could function efficiently, and such a system should eventually be implemented throughout the Secretariat. The information obtained from that system not only would lead to more solid criteria for decisions in the areas of budget, planning, cost control and management, but also would help to rationalize the scheduling of meetings and requests for documentation and would make the various bodies aware of the incremental costs they would incur. In order to adopt a final decision concerning the creation of such a system, he requested the Secretariat to provide preliminary estimates of the expenditures which would be necessary to set up such a system, together with a time-frame for each phase of the project. In that regard, since only a common, transparent and objective methodology would allow for comparisons and operational conclusions, he encouraged the Secretariat to take into account the experience of all duty stations in developing that system.

43. He believed that the coordination between duty stations which the new organic conference-services structure would provide could be increased even further by a system of managed assignments based on non-monetary incentives, which would help to alleviate the impact of the high vacancy rate in the language services at some duty stations and ensure the required quality of services throughout the Secretariat.

44. With regard to the volume of documentation, he welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to limit all documentation prepared by the Secretariat to a maximum of 16 pages and urged the intergovernmental bodies to gradually reduce their reports from 32 to 20 pages.

45. Given the satisfactory results of the decision to prepare unedited transcripts rather than verbatim records for the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and the fact that such preparation was less expensive and the transcripts were released much more rapidly, it was regrettable that the experiment had been undertaken in very few of the bodies which were entitled to written records of their meetings.

46. In the area of new technologies, he welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to further develop the optical disk system and to facilitate access to it. He noted in particular that all translators had direct access to that system, which would help to improve the quality of translation and would make it of more consistent quality. With regard to computer-assisted translation systems, he endorsed the Committee's recommendation that the systems used should be compatible with the existing computer platforms at the United Nations and that, in further developing the use of such systems, the experience of all duty station should be taken into account.

47. **Mr. Zackheos** (Cyprus) said his delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union. His delegation had enthusiastically embraced the introduction of the Optical Disk System and fully endorsed recommendations for its further expansion. With respect to implementation of the cost-accounting system, the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) and the Document Records, Information and Tracking System (DRITS) would need to be refined in order to overcome the difficulties arising from the lack of interface between those two systems.

48. He wished to raise an issue of particular concern to his delegation, relating to the circulation of official United Nations documents. The Turkish delegation's practice of circulating letters from the secessionist entity in the occupied northern part of Cyprus created a dangerous precedent, undermining the relevant decisions of the United Nations and creating additional costs. In that context he recalled that the Security Council in resolution 541 (1983) had stated that the secessionist entity was legally invalid and in resolution 550 (1984) had called upon all States not to facilitate or in any way assist that entity. Although his delegation had protested against that practice both orally and in writing, no action had been taken to put an end to it. If the Government of a State were to distribute letters in which an ethnic or minority group alleged that it was the victim of repressive measures or that its fundamental human rights were not recognized in the sovereign territory of another State, the Government of Cyprus reserved the right to act in the same way if that practice continued.

49. He expressed his delegation's appreciation to the Committee on Conferences for recommending in its report that United Nations bodies should avoid holding meetings

on 9 April 1999, the date of Easter in the Orthodox Church, and that that fact should be taken into account in drafting future calendars of conferences and meetings.

50. **Ms. Güray** (Turkey), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that a response to the comments by the delegation of Cyprus would be made by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

51. **Mr. Zackheos** (Cyprus), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, stated that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was a secessionist entity condemned by the Security Council in its resolutions and that the only legitimate Government of that territory was the Republic of Cyprus.

52. **Ms. Güray** (Turkey), speaking again in exercise of the right of reply, suggested that the parties concerned should consult the relevant documents of the United Nations.

Organization of work

53. **Mr. Jara** (Chile), speaking with reference to the list of candidates for vacancies in subsidiary bodies, stated that, as the Secretariat had pointed out in a note, the Latin American and Caribbean Group supported the candidacies of Mr. Daverede (Argentina), Mr. Chaparro Ruiz (Chile) and Mr. Greiver (Uruguay) for the Committee on Contributions.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.